

**STATEMENT OF JOHN PARSONS, ASSOCIATE REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR LANDS, RESOURCES AND PLANNING, NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 1970, A BILL TO AMEND THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM ACT TO UPDATE THE FEASIBILITY AND SUITABILITY STUDY ORIGINALLY PREPARED FOR THE TRAIL OF TEARS NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL AND PROVIDE FOR THE INCLUSION OF NEW TRAIL SEGMENTS, LAND COMPONENTS, AND CAMPGROUNDS ASSOCIATED WITH THAT TRAIL**

**February 16, 2006**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 1970. The bill would amend the National Trails System Act to update the feasibility and suitability study of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail (NHT).

We thank Senators Tom Coburn, Bill Frist, and Lamar Alexander for their interest in and support of the commemoration of the Trail of Tears NHT. The Department supports updating the feasibility and suitability study for the Trail of Tears NHT; however, we recommend that S. 1970 be amended to remove the automatic designation of any additions to the original trail the study determines to be eligible. In a time of austere budgets and a refocusing on the core mission of the National Park Service (NPS), we believe that available funding should be first directed toward taking care of what we already own.

S. 1970 would update the feasibility and suitability study for the Trail of Tears NHT through the examination of additional routes, land components, and campgrounds associated with that trail not included in the initial study. The Secretary of the Interior would determine if some or all of

these components are eligible additions to the trail at the completion of the study. Further, it would authorize the Secretary to make designations of any of these additional routes, land components and campgrounds that she found eligible. The National Trails System Act does not provide for additions to trails subsequent to their designation by Congress.

A network of 24 scenic and historic trails has been created since the enactment of the National Trails System Act in 1968. These trails provide for outdoor recreation needs, providing enjoyment and appreciation, which in turn, promotes good health and well-being. They traverse resources that connect us to history and provide an important opportunity for local communities to become involved in a national effort by encouraging public access and citizen involvement.

In 1987, Congress designated the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. The trail encompassed the primary water route and northern land route used during the forced removal of the Cherokee Nation from its homelands in the southeast to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). The trail is administered by the NPS.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 mandated the removal of all Indian tribes from east of the Mississippi River to lands west of Arkansas and Missouri. Of the Five Civilized Tribes, the Cherokee were perhaps the most successful at resisting the Act's implementation. But their fate was sealed in 1838 when the U.S. government was determined to complete the Removal. The roundup began in May, as thousands of Cherokee families were brought by force to nearby military forts or camps, and subsequently marched to the principal emigration depots at Ross's Landing or Fort Cass in Tennessee, or Fort Payne in Alabama. From there, they either walked

overland or rode river steamboats, flatboats, and keelboats to Indian Territory. By the spring of 1839, nearly the entire Cherokee Nation, comprising some 16,000 individuals from all levels of society, had been removed west.

The 1992 Comprehensive Management and Use Plan for the Trail of Tears NHT identified the need to study two additional major routes of Cherokee Removal, the Bell and Benge Routes in the states of Tennessee, Alabama, Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma as possible additions to the existing trail. Both of these routes are included in S. 1970. Subsequently, the Cherokee Nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Trail of Tears Association, and other trail supporters have urged the NPS to include additional important routes of Cherokee Removal in Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, and Oklahoma. These routes lead from the many removal forts established by the military during the roundup of the Cherokee to the major embarkation sites from which the Cherokee people left on their tragic journey to Indian Territory. The roundup of the Cherokee is a major part of the story of the Trail of Tears, and it is not adequately represented by the current trail.

The Department recognizes the importance of telling the complete story of the Trail of Tears. Updating the feasibility and suitability study would cost approximately \$175,000. Also, the NPS estimates that it would require an additional \$295,000 per year to adequately provide funding for staff, travel, supplies, and other costs to administer the new routes.

Historic trails cross public and private lands, and the intent of the National Trails System Act is one of respecting private property rights. In so doing, the development of strong partnerships is

critical to administering and managing the historic trails and achieving preservation of trail resources and interpretation of the trail to the public. The Trail of Tears NHT demonstrates the results of this type of effort.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.